

Frequently Asked Questions Regarding The Solar Rebates

How was the Solar Energy Rebate program created?

The program was created by an act of Maine's legislature last spring and does not take effect until September 19, 2005. The PUC has been working to develop rules to administer the program and to train and certify qualified system installers. The law says that the rebates will apply to all systems installed after July 1, 2005. We are telling folks who would like to purchase systems before our final rules are in place to carefully review the legislation, and to document that their purchase complies with all of the law's requirements so that when a final rule is adopted and the law becomes effective, we will be able to issue a rebate check to them.

A copy of the law may be found at www.maine.gov/msep.

I would like more information on the new solar incentives.

We are still working on an informational bulletin that will be available to those requesting information on the new solar incentives. We are working on rulemaking this instant.

At this point, we do not have a list of contractors. We will develop one over time, once we have a system in place to identify those contractors who meet the qualifications specified in the law.

Please e-mail karen.bickerman@maine.gov to be put on a list to be notified when the bulletin is ready, or the information has been posted on our website. You should also watch news and newspapers for more information regarding the rulemaking process. There will be an opportunity for public input during this process.

Why does the PUC take so long to develop its rules?

Rulemakings by State agencies are required to follow a certain process. The rule must accurately reflect the legislation that enables it, so the first step is to develop a draft rule that is reviewed and approved by the Commissioners. The proposed rule is then reviewed by the Attorney General's office prior to public posting. After the proposed rule and its notice are issued, a period for formal written comment follows. A public hearing may also be held. At the conclusion of the comment period, the Commission will review all comments and address them in the development of its final rule.

While the process may seem lengthy and cumbersome, it ensures that anyone interested in a proceeding can make his or her interests known. This enables agencies to develop better rules and allows those who follow the proceeding to understand the rationale for decisions made. Individuals who want to ensure that the Commission addresses their comments should go to the Commission's website, get copies of the proposed rule (<http://mpuc.informe.org/easyfile/>, Docket No. 2005-400), and comment on the rule as instructed in the Commission's press release:

http://www.state.me.us/mpuc/staying_informed/news/news_releases/prSolarRebate.htm.

I took the solar installers course offered in the 1980's and have installed many systems. Will I need to be recertified to do these installations?

Until the Commission develops its final rule, your earlier training qualifies you to install systems that will qualify for the rebate so long as you are a licensed plumber or working with one. Because earlier solar installer training provided by the State was limited to solar hot water systems, any solar photovoltaic systems you install will NOT be considered qualified to receive a rebate. For photovoltaic systems, a qualified installer is someone who has a master electrician's license and is either certified by the "North American Board of Energy Practitioners" (NABCEP) or who has taken a course to prepare for the NABCEP certification examination. Alternatively, the system can qualify if it is installed by a master electrician working in conjunction with someone who is NABCEP certified or who has taken a course to

prepare for the certification. We are currently developing a new training and certification program for people who would like to become certified to install hot water systems. If you are interested in this course, please send your contact information to karen.bickerman@maine.gov.

What does one have to do to be eligible for the rebate for a system ordered before September 17?

Under the law, which becomes effective on September 17, 2005, certain solar energy systems installed by qualified installers and installed after July 1, 2005, will be eligible for rebates to help reduce system cost. The Public Utilities Commission rulemaking will develop final program details to clarify how consumers can take advantage of the rebates. In the meantime, consumers interested in purchasing systems before the rulemaking is complete should read the legislation carefully to ensure the systems they purchase and that the contractors who are hired to install them meet all requirements of the law. They should also save all documentation necessary to demonstrate that the system they purchased complies. Full text of the law can be found on the Commission's State Energy Program website at <http://www.maine.gov/msep/>.

Would you please send us the appropriate forms for the new solar rebate program?

Our agency is in the process of developing a rule that will implement the legislation signed by Governor Baldacci on June 29. The rulemaking process has formal comment periods that are required by law, which make it impossible to finalize this until early September.

People will still be able to obtain rebates for any systems installed after July 1, but they should read the rebate law VERY carefully to ensure that they have complied with its provisions – none of which can be waived by our rule. A copy of the law is available at the Maine State Energy Program website: <http://www.maine.gov/msep/>.

What is meant by a grid-connected system?

A grid-connected system is a solar system (electric or thermal) attached to a home that receives its electricity from a utility.

I am frustrated by the number of requirements for solar installers.

We certainly understand your frustration with the requirements for installers to be licensed professionals and to have been certified - either by the Public Utilities Commission in the case of hot water systems, or by the North American Board of Certified Energy Practitioners (NABCEP) in the case of photovoltaic systems. These provisions were included in the law that was passed by the legislature to ensure that consumers receive well-installed systems. For this reason the provisions can only be changed by the legislature.

You may not be aware that there are some less onerous aspects to the law. Licensed electrician or plumbers who are working with individuals who have been certified would be considered "Qualified Installers" under the law. Also under the law, people who have taken the training to prepare for NABCEP certification and are licensed electricians or working with licensed electricians will be considered qualified PV installers until January 1, 2007.

I notice that you've started a list of Certified Solar Installers on your website. Can you recommend someone?

We do not recommend specific installers, but do recommend that you speak with several to obtain competitive price quotes.

How is the list of projects qualified to receive rebates going to be maintained?

We are sorry that we can't answer this question at this point since it is an element of our rulemaking. If you've read our notice of proposed rule, you will see that we too, have worried about how to maintain people's place in the queue for rebate funds. One approach raised in the notice of rule, is a pre-application process in which the customer (or their vendor) submits the paperwork proposing what it is they wish to do, and how much it will cost. We would review the application and issue a pre-approval saying the system proposed qualifies for \$X. Upon submission of final invoices, we would cut the rebate check. This of course, is only one model. We will consider others that are suggested in the rulemaking.

We heartily encourage you to submit your suggestion and any others you think would help to make our program successful in the rulemaking proceeding. You can find our notice of rulemaking and proposed rule at the Commission website (<http://mpuc.informe.org/easyfile/>, Docket Number 2005-400). You may submit comments either at the public hearing on the rule, which will be held on August 11, at 1:30 in the Commissions hearing room. If you cannot make the hearing you can still file comments by sending them to the Commission's administrative director until August 21st. Please send the comments to the Attention of the Administrative Director. Reference Docket Number 2005-400, and address them to Maine Public Utilities Commission, State House Station #18, Augusta, Maine 04333.

The Commission's rulemaking process requires us to address all of the comments made. If you take the trouble to provide input to us, we guarantee that the comments will be read and considered.

We have just purchased a solar electric system for our home. Is it true that I will still have to be hooked up to the electric grid to be able to use the rebate incentive?

Yes. According to the law, homes that are not connected to the grid will not be eligible for rebates.

I have read your website regarding rebates for solar systems; are there any programs that offer grants for seniors and/or disabled folks?

There are federal fuel assistance funds available for those who meet the income guidelines. If you believe this may apply to your situation, please contact your local Community Assistance Program in your county. If you need help paying your electric bill, you should contact the Maine PUC Consumer Assistance Division at 1-800-452-4699.

Is the rebate for 25% of the cost for installation or solar hot water system and 25% of the cost of a solar air heat system? Or is it just for one or the other.

It seems that the legislation does not prohibit anyone from installing all three types of systems (electric, hot water, hot air) and applying for the rebates on all three. **HOWEVER** an official determination will not be made until the rule is finalized, so we can not guarantee any result at this time.

Do solar air heating units qualify for the state rebates?

Solar air units are eligible for the rebate of 25% of the system cost or \$1,250, whichever is less in accordance with Section 2.C of L.D. 1586. Individuals wishing to purchase systems now in advance of the Commission's final rule are advised to read the legislation carefully to ensure that the system they purchase qualifies and that they document the information required to demonstrate eligibility.

What about the Federal Solar Rebates

Please visit <http://www.seia.org/getpdf.php?iid=21>.